

TOP

Tips on parenting



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Should You Speak Your Native Language at Home? Ten TOP Reasons to Do So!

by Dr. Lisa Pray

If you are so fortunate that you speak two or more languages, have you ever wondered whether it is better to speak English with your children at home or your native language? If this question is of interest to you, please read on and rest assured that speaking your first language at home with your children will help them in multiple ways. Let's count down the important reasons why you could help your children by using their (and your) first language.

10. Children who read and speak their first language at home learn English faster and perform better academically. Several studies have shown that when students' first language and reading skills are more developed, they learn English faster than students who develop both languages at the same time (MacSwan & Pray, 2005; August & Shanahan, 2006). This does not mean that parents should delay the introduction of English. Instead they should continue to develop their children's first language by talking and reading with them using the language they know best as their children learn a second language.

9. When parents help their children maintain and develop their first language as they learn English, they help their children understand, value, and support their cultural identity and heritage. Children who are able to do this are often more successful in school and more successful as they learn English (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, Ovando, Collier & Combs, 2006).

8. If a child's first language is not used in the home, they often lose their first language as they gain greater proficiency in English. This trend is called "subtractive bilingualism," and if it happens too early in a child's life, it is often associated with the child experiencing more difficulty in school.

Children who lose their first language at an early age often do not perform as well on standardized tests at school (Ovando, Collier & Combs, 2006).

7. Children who continue to use and learn their first language can continue to communicate with the family members who may not have learned to speak English. Can you imagine not being able to understand your grandfather's stories or not being able to learn about your family from your grandmother? Family relationships are so important to children of all ages. Why let language differences come between your children and others in your family?

6. When parents speak to their children in the language they know best, they are able to express more complex and abstract ideas, which helps their children understand complex and abstract ideas in school, even if the language of instruction is in English. When parents and children speak the language they know

"Family relationships are so important to children of all ages."



Should You Speak Your Native Language at Home?

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best, they are speaking from their highest level of thinking. This allows students to continue their learning about many different concepts at a developmentally appropriate level as they learn English (Ovando, Collier & Combs, 2006). Well-meaning parents who insist on talking with their children using a language neither they nor their children understand well, hinder the child's ability to learn interesting concepts from them. You are your children's first and best teacher. Teach them in the language you know best!

5. When parents read to their children in the language they know best, they help their children develop a love for reading. When parents talk with and read to their children in the language they know best, they help them to develop good oral language and literacy skills. If children are good readers in one language, it will help them become good readers in another language. We all know that reading skills are critical to success in school!

4. Students who are able to read, write, speak, and understand two languages will perform better on tests of academic achievement. In fact, students who developed and maintained their first language as they learned their second language earned higher standardized test scores, on average, than other students who speak only one language (Collier, 1992; Collier and Thomas, 2004).

3. Bilingual ability will provide greater economic opportunities to children as they enter the work force and enter higher education. Job opportunities for our children will be much different than the opportunities we have experienced. Considering the growth in international business, future job-seekers who speak only one language will be considered less marketable than those who speak more than one language. If your children speak more than one language, they can relate to more customers or employees from places all over the world.

2. Parents often worry that their children, especially young children, will become confused if they hear two languages at home. Recent research has found that children as young as nine months old are able understand the difference when talked to in two languages and respond appropriately. They were able to respond to English speakers in English and French speakers in French! (Genesee, 2003). Certainly children make mistakes while they learn English as their second language. Some of those mistakes can be attributed to their first language, but usually these errors are evidence that children are in the process of experimenting with and discovering a new language, not suffering from long-term

or debilitating confusion (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

1. Speaking to your children using their first language is easy and natural! Parents do not have to be

formally schooled to provide crucial support in helping their children develop good oral language skills in the language they know best. For example, talking while solving problems together, fixing or building something, cooking and eating a meal together, or talking about a movie, encourages the language growth of children as they learn and understand the world.

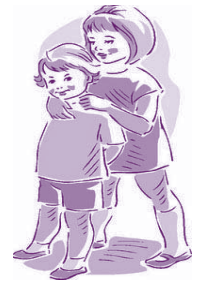
As parents, you play an important role in helping to reinforce learning at home, and the best way to do that is to speak the language that you and your children know best. Keep up the good work!

"As parents, you play an important role in helping to reinforce learning at home."

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The Other Side of the "Terrible Twos": The Terrific Twos

by Dr. Kathy Kalmar

You've no doubt heard mothers complain of the "terrible twos." Is there another side of the story? Can the twos be terrific? The purpose of this article is to explore that possibility. When your toddler is having a meltdown because he can't get the round puzzle piece into the square hole or can't make it snow by wearing his winter coat outside when it is still summer, you may feel like tearing your hair out. Your toddler is most likely in a normal phase of growth that is called a disequilibrium (Ilg, & Ames, 1955). Disequilibrium is a stage wherein emotional and physical balance are, quite simply, "out of whack." During this time, your loveable child can become temperamental, frustrated, negative, and unpredictable. Your normally sweet-tempered baby may become irritable, hard to please, and demanding.

This is normal. In this predictable stage of development, it is not easy for parents. Coping takes equal parts of understanding, patience, and sainthood. However, there is hope. Just knowing that your child is behaving normally for her age is difficult to keep in mind as your child is busily dumping the blocks, sweeping toys off the shelf, and emptying the toy box yet again.

MELTDOWNS AND TANTRUMS

You may be used to a much happier – even compliant – cooperative child. Suddenly, overnight, you have a new, easily frustrated, upset toddler on your hands. This outburst of anger occurs because your baby is growing up, maturing, and developing even though it doesn't look like it. Contrary behavior and opposition to your suggestions is normal behavior.

During the second year of life, your child is becoming a separate individual with likes and dislikes that he doesn't quite know or understand yet. This time in your child's life, while difficult for a parent to

deal with is part of normal two-year-old behavior. Your child is rapidly expanding horizons and trying new things. Some things he tries are just not possible. When things fail (because they defy the realm of physics and gravity itself), your child may react strongly with outbursts and temper tantrums. These temper tantrums happen because your child is frustrated. Things that cause frustration may be a toy train derauling or your child's attempt to put the train track together in a way that just won't work.

Recently, I watched as my two-and-a-half-year-old grandson attempted to put his train track on the train table but the track didn't fit. The table was too small. The track too big. The track went off the table and fell apart. Repeatedly, he tried vainly to make the train track fit the table; it was impossible. Many toddlers may try to do similar things and when that fails, they wail. I view this challenging time in a toddler's life as learning, as experiments, as "toddler physics." "Toddler physics" is the process of experimenting with what is possible and what is not. It's what the laws of nature allow or not. The following chart shows what to expect from two-year-olds:

Typical Toddler Trying Behaviors:

- Being negative
- Being possessive
- Pushing, hitting, shoving
- Wanting their own way
- Behaving better in morning or afternoon; preferring one or the other
- Eating well one day and eating "poorly" for several days
- Being noisy
- Dawdling
- Being stubborn
- Being demanding
- Being "defiant"
- Being driven by strong impulses
- Possessing strong feelings

- Making big messes
- Dumping
- Filling
- Becoming over-tired and over-stimulated
- Getting into things
- Becomes oppositional (Herr, 2004; Miller, 2001)

"TODDLER PHYSICS"

Everyone is limited by what the physical world and its laws permit. Physics dictates what is possible and, in contrast, what isn't. Toddlers don't know how the physical world works; hence, they try many things that don't work. For example, they may try to stand on a cardboard nesting block only to find they are too big, the block is too unstable or is not strong enough to maintain their weight. When the cardboard blocks fail to hold them, a meltdown is likely. With building blocks, they may try repeatedly to balance a rectangle block on top of a triangular one. That doesn't work. Troopers that they are, they persevere and try again (a positive trait when one thinks about it) but one that is destined to fail. The blocks fall, the toddler reacts negatively. Explaining why the block fell and even showing the toddler why this is happening generally has little effect.

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

Toddlers have several developmental tasks. One task is to become independent of adults. It is the toddlers' lesson in physics to see what can and cannot happen in the physical world. When events don't work out as anticipated, they become frustrated and may have a temper tantrum. This can occur when they outgrow their favorite slippers and

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no matter how hard they try, the slippers just won't go on their feet. This process of trying things out is how toddlers learn. They experiment, and often times, fail. They don't fully grasp how things work; but, they passionately want to know. They don't have the experience yet to know that a part of a toy is too small or too big to fit in whatever improbable place they want it to fit. However, this is precisely how they do find out. This repetition and trial by error is how they learn what does work, what does fit, and unfortunately, what doesn't.

Another example of toddlers misunderstanding of how things should go can occur with very ordinary tasks such as unwrapping a slice of cheese or unpackaging a piece of string cheese. Some days, she will be happy to let you do it and all is well. At other times, it'll be the end of the world when you unwrap the cheese. Should the cheese tear or break, a full scale meltdown can occur.

Another instance that characterizes "toddler physics" occurs when a toddler tries to get into small, cramped places wherein he can barely fit. These are places where parents do not want them to go. Trying to fit in there anyway is typical two-year-old behavior. Amazingly enough, occasionally she can manage to squeeze into such an improbable place, but not without risk to their safety. Be on the watch for entrapment. Small areas like the insides of a high chair can be dangerous. Fitting behind the potted ficus tree, or behind an end table can endanger and entrap them. At the very least, getting into these small spaces could cause a lamp to fall or worse.

WHAT TO DO

Try to push the end table to the wall. Do what you can do to safeguard your home. If that is not possible, be with them and remove them before they try getting into tight spaces. Re-arrange furniture that could tempt their curiosity and urge them to climb or hide. Peek-a-Boo takes on a new dimension during the second year of life. Toddlers try hiding to surprise you. That, they surely do! Still another developmental task for toddlers is to learn to talk. Children this age pick up words at a fascinating and almost miraculous rate. They process what they experience, do, see, and hear. Sometimes, they repeat things adults wish they hadn't overheard. However, even though the toddler's vocabulary is growing, all too frequently they still don't have enough "word power" to clearly express their wants, needs, and demands. Sometimes, adults don't understand their words. Not being able to communicate their ideas frustrates the child and often leads to a tantrum. A tantrum is a typical response when toddlers are frustrated.

To help children through this trying period, two tips will make life easier. One thing to do is to develop a routine that your child can rely on. Do not deviate from this schedule; keep the order of events even when something interferes with it. Two, devise rituals to help ease your child through the rough patches of the day. Bedtime rituals are particularly helpful in getting your child to bed smoothly.

THE TERRIFIC TWOS

Fortunately, there always is a positive side to help balance the negative. With toddlers, the positives are that tantrums are a normal part of development. He has found a way to express his feelings. Learning to express discontent is a good conflict resolving skill that will serve your child well later in life. Negative feelings must be released. In time, you and teachers will help your child learn to use words to express negative feelings; but, for now, expressing discontent really is important. Your child is gaining control over her world. He is walking. Your child is talking. That's progress. Many times, the way she puts words together is absolutely amazing. Recently, my grandson said, "I like your shirt, Grammie." Where that came from or why gave us something to smile about (my tee shirt wasn't anything remarkable).

Your child is learning every minute of every day. They are exploring and discovering all the time. They are curious and will pick items up often asking, "What's this?" That may sound like "Dis?" depending on their stage of language development. Remarkably, children can express a whole sentence in a single word.

This too is normal development. The things your child will say, the way he dances around imitating what he sees is something that never comes again in your child's life. For these remarkable, cute, enduring times to occur again, you will have to wait until you have another child, become a grandparent, or have a video recording in order to re-experience these unique moments in time. These terrific children will don their daddy's big boots, wrap shawls over their heads and try to walk, put baskets on their heads as hats, or put the TV remote to their ears and say "Hello."

For every difficult toddler moment, there is learning and some amazingly delightful things that outweigh the negative. More importantly, there is almost always something they are learning. I like to call that learning process "toddler physics." Watching them pretending to paint their nails or shave their faces is absolutely powerful and unforgettable. To think that they learned that much just by watching you do daily, ordinary tasks is truly fascinating.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

There is no escaping the tantrums and meltdowns that characterize the second and third year of life. As children strive to do things for themselves, they constantly face what they still cannot do on their own, and they don't like that. Perhaps the greatest thing you can do is to understand that these behaviors really do indicate that your child is developing and is growing up normally. Your children are learning to tell and show adults their displeasure. Learning what can and cannot happen is difficult and disappointing. It's also beyond their experiences.

At the same time, however, they are learning to express,



Terrible Twos: Terrific Twos

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release, and ultimately control their emotions. They are thinking, experimenting, and learning. You can help manage this time in their lives by understanding that these behaviors are normal and to be expected.

In addition, you can also try to keep things that frustrate them to a minimum. Don't tell them too early in the day that they're going to the mall. The only "time" toddlers understand is "now." To help them through this challenging time in their lives, keep their naptime and bedtime routines consistent. Keep them rested and fed. Accept that your child may melt down. Give her the time and space to get it out of her system. Wait until the wails stop and then move in and comfort your child. Tell him that it is "so aggravating that the silly blanket was just too small to cover the heap of stuffed animals." Make a joke out of it if you can, saying, "Go away, small blanket. We're going to use mama's big afghan."

OTHER THINGS YOU CAN DO

Humor goes a long way and often distracts your child. So does simply removing the child from the source of upset. Walk away from the problem. Move on to other things within your child's range of ability all the while remembering that this is how this stage of life goes. Distract them with another toy, activity, a kiss, or a change in location. Carry them away from the source of their frustration. Lastly, focus on the sweet kisses, the spontaneous hugs, the attempts to put their binkies or their crackers in your mouth, the times they take your hand in theirs and walk you to where they need you to go, the times they plop into your lap and cuddle into you, and above all else remember that this stage too shall pass. All too soon, those chubby little legs and those unclear words will be a part of the past, so remember the twos are terrific too and make the most of them. Your child has a right to her toddlerhood, and it is right to live through it and celebrate it.

The Other Side Of The Twos: The Terrific Twos:

- Talks
 - Imitates adults (you!)
 - Is curious
 - Is courageous
 - Loves to move
 - Is affectionate
 - Is funny
 - Is perseverant
 - Is caring and loving
 - Likes rituals
 - Walks
 - Explores
 - Is spontaneous
 - Is bold
 - Dances
 - Is cute
 - Is creative
 - Is passionate
 - Likes routines
- (Herr, 2005; Miller, 2001).

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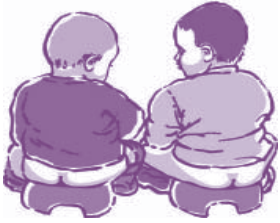


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Potty Training – Get Ready, Get Set, Go!

By Elizabeth Pantley, Author of *The No-Cry Potty Training Solution*

Get Ready

If your child is near or has passed his first birthday, you can begin incorporating pre-potty training ideas into his life. They are simple things that will lay the groundwork for potty training and will make the process much easier when you're ready to begin.

- During diaper changes, narrate the process to teach your toddler the words and meanings for bathroom-related functions, such as pee-pee and poo-poo. Include descriptive words that you'll use during the process, such as wet, dry, wipe, and wash.
- If you're comfortable with it, bring your child with you when you use the toilet. Explain what you're doing. Tell him that when he gets bigger, he'll put his pee-pee and poo-poo in the toilet instead of in his diaper. Let him flush the toilet if he wants to.
- Help your toddler identify what's happening when she wets or fills her diaper. Tell her, "You're going poo-poo in your diaper." Have her watch you dump and flush.
- Start giving your child simple directions and help him to follow them. For example, ask him to get a toy from another room or to put the spoon in the dishwasher.
- Encourage your child to do things on her own: put on her socks, pull up her pants, carry a cup to the sink, or fetch a book.
- Have a daily sit-and-read time together.
- Take the readiness quiz again every month or two to see if you're ready to move on to active potty learning.

Get Set

- Buy a potty chair, a dozen pairs of training pants, four or more elastic-waist pants or shorts, and a supply of pull-up diapers or disposables with a feel-the-wetness sensation liner.
- Put the potty in the bathroom, and tell your child what it's for.
- Read books about going potty to your child.
- Let your child practice just sitting on the potty without expecting a deposit.

Go

- Begin dressing your child in training pants or pull-up diapers.

- Create a potty routine – have your child sit on the potty when she first wakes up, after meals, before getting in the car, and before bed.
- If your child looks like she needs to go, tell, don't ask! Say, "Let's go to the potty."
- Boys and girls both can learn sitting down. Teach your son to hold his penis down. He can learn to stand when he's tall enough to reach.
- Your child must relax to go: read a book, tell a story, sing, or talk about the day.
- Make hand washing a fun part of the routine. Keep a step stool by the sink, and have colorful, child-friendly soap available.
- Praise her when she goes!
- Expect accidents, and clean them up calmly.
- Matter-of-factly use diapers or pull-ups for naps and bedtime.
- Either cover the car seat or use pull-ups or diapers for car trips.

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activity corner

Kool-Aid Playdough

Kool-Aid, a powder flavored drink mix, provides color and fruity scents to playdough. It is a good alternative to food coloring. When children play with the dough they are not only strengthening the small muscles in their hands, but they are also enjoying the scent of orange, lime, or grape.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups boiling water**
- 1 pkg. unsweetened Kool-Aid (e.g., orange, lime, grape)**
- 2 tbsp. vegetable oil**
- 2 cups flour**
- 1 cup salt**
- 4 tsp. cream of tartar**

Directions:

Pour the hot water into a mixing bowl. Stir in the Kool-Aid and vegetable oil. In a saucepan, mix together the flour, salt, and cream of tartar. Add the Kool-Aid mixture to the pan and cook on medium heat, stirring constantly with a spoon. The dough is done when it pulls away from the sides of the pan. Take the dough out of the pan and knead it into a ball. Store the playdough in an airtight container.



Potty Training

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- Visit new bathrooms frequently when away from home.
- Be patient! It will take three to twelve months for your child to be an independent toileter.

Stop

- If your child has temper tantrums or sheds tears over potty training, or if you find yourself getting angry, then stop training. Review your training plan and then try again, using a slightly different approach if necessary, in a month or two.



This article is an excerpt from *The No-Cry Potty Training Solution: Gentle Ways to Help Your Child Say Good-Bye to Diapers* by Elizabeth Pantley (McGraw-Hill, 2006).

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

question

corner

“My 5-year-old daughter’s best friend moved away a couple weeks ago. A few days after the move, my daughter began to talk about an imaginary friend. My daughter asks us not to sit on the imaginary friend, tells us to speak to the imaginary friend, and even asks that the imaginary friend have a plate at dinner. Should I be concerned about my daughter’s recent obsession with this imaginary playmate?”

— Jack in Utah

Children use their imagination and creativity to express their thoughts and feelings. A child whose friend moved away may be experiencing a sense of loss and loneliness. An imaginary friend provides the child with an acceptable way to manage her emotions. Some children also invent imaginary friends when they experience the arrival of a new brother or sister. Creating imaginary playmates in the preschool years is common, especially for girls. The imaginary friend can help the child feel safe, express feelings such as anger, and take the blame for the child’s acting out behavior (e.g., broken toy). The imaginary friend also provides the child with comfort and companionship. Parents can participate in the child’s play when they are invited, but should follow the child’s lead. The imaginary friend often disappears once the child’s anxieties have subsided (e.g., accepted the new baby). Parents do not need to be concerned about imaginary playmates unless the imaginary friend interferes with the child’s relationship with other children. If the child created the imaginary friend because she was lonely, the parent may want to provide more opportunities for the child to interact with real children. Professional help is only needed if the parent suspects the child is having delusions. However, children who experience delusions have other symptoms and lapses in reality other than an imaginary friend.

~Heidi Malloy, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Psychology at Metropolitan State University.

question corner features questions posed by parents to early childhood experts who provide brief responses in this newsletter. If you have any questions you would like answered, please send e-mail to eejcenter@cc.usu.edu or mail to EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education, Utah State University, 6705 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-6705.

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